3 | *Corps habillés*, Nouchis and subaltern Bigmanity in Côte d'Ivoire

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The last time I spoke to 'General' Ato Belly was on Thursday, 31 March 2011. It was the first night of the battle for Abidjan between armed forces defending the incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo and those dedicated to instating the elected president Alassane Ouattara.[1] This battle heralded the tragic finale of the post-electoral crisis which took a decisive turn with the arrest of Laurent Gbagbo, ten days later. The pro-Ouattara offensive was launched both from the rebel-held northern territories by the recently raised Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI), and from within Abidjan by the so-called 'Invisible Commando' led by Major Coulibaly, alias IB. This urban guerrilla group had been active in Abidjan for more than a month when at the end of March, simultaneously with the final FRCI offensive on Abidjan, it began attacking strategic sites in the heart of the city: army camps and headquarters, the presidential palace and residence, and not least the buildings of the national radio and television, RTI.[2] In response, the pro-Gbagbo, so-called 'patriotic' armed forces stepped up their mobilization efforts by recruiting youngsters and/or handing out arms (mainly Kalashnikovs) to them.

At about midnight on that Thursday, the 31st, Ato Belly was defending the RTI against the Invisible Commando when the deafening noise of detonations forced us to break off our (last) telephone conversation. Previously Ato had expressed his dismay about the speed of the FRCI blitz and (related to that) the alacrity with which the majority of the regular armed forces – called the FDS (Defence and Security Forces) – had abandoned their positions. Forestalling an imminent military debacle for the pro-Gbagbo camp, Ato Belly took up the arms which he had officially put down back in May 2009. Then he was formally disarmed as a member, with the rank of 'general', of Abidjan's largest militia, the Grouping of Patriots for Peace (GPP, Groupement des Patriotes pour la Paix). Even when earlier that month patriotic youth leader Charles Blé Goudé urged youngsters to sign up for immediate recruitment into the army, Ato had declined the offer. Nonetheless, he told me how he found pride in assisting in the enrolment of many members of his *gbôhi*. The latter is the Nouchi term for gang or group and, as we will see soon, it can refer to different types of networks, bands and fractions, as well as

formal militia groups (see also Banégas 2011). The junior militia members of Ato's *gbôhi*, he reported, were quartered at the prestigious infantry camp of Akouédo, and he reckoned they were finally very close to becoming real soldiers: 'they have a bed, a uniform, and a firearm of their own'.

Ato Belly's reluctance to join the patriotic battle this time around was largely due to his resentment of the Gbagbo administration for lack of recognition and remuneration for his participation in the previous patriotic battles (following the *coup d'état* of 2002). Among other things, his long-standing pro-Gbagbo militantism had resulted in the creation in 2004 and 2007 of GPP militia barracks in different parts of Abidjan. Instead of official appreciation, Ato had seen both barracks being forcibly shut down by the FDS on direct orders from the president, whose embattled nation he was trying to defend. On top of that, the 500,000 CFA (approximately 900 euro) demobilization fee promised to every formally demobilized militia member was never disbursed by the Gbagbo administration. This was all too much for Ato, who not only needed this money for his young family – living in a ramshackle house with a ten-month-old disabled daughter – but also for the hundreds of youngsters of his *gbôhi* who kept on hassling him for financial support or urging him to raise the matter of this broken promise among the militia leadership and its patrons in presidential circles. But against all odds, Thursday, 31 March offered the occasion for ultimate redress.

During our last telephone conversation, Ato explained that he was rigged out in full battledress, put together from the uniforms, boots, berets and belts left behind by the many FDS who had abandoned the RTI premises. He had even succeeded, he added, in procuring a number of shoulder marks (*galons*) which he would put on later. Also, he had an impressive number of weapons at his disposal: Kalashnikovs in great numbers as well as anti-tank RPG-7 grenade launchers. Finally, Ato did not miss the opportunity to point out that all this took place in the presence, and with the support, of Gbagbo's finest and manifestly bravest army unit, the Republican Guards (Gardes Républicaines). They made this sudden transformation 'real': vouching for his value as a soldier, turning his hasty dressing-up into an official act of instantaneous conscription, and converting his seized weaponry and insignia into bestowals complementing his last-ditch, 'well-deserved' career move.

Militias and pre-peace networking

The above section recounts one of the many tragic micro-moments in Côte d'Ivoire's recent post-electoral drama which formed the violent denouement of a long decade of political-military strife. The latter started with the 1999 *coup d'état* removing Henri Konan Bédié from power, followed by a turbulent military transition under General Guéï. Laurent Gbagbo's seizure of power in late 2000 and the (half-successful) *coup d'état* which ensued from this in

September 2002 resulted in the creation of a rebel-held northern zone. The recent post-electoral crisis began when Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara both claimed victory in the November 2010 presidential elections. After four months of fruitless mediation the crisis took a decisive turn when the two protagonists had recourse to military force and Ouattara won owing largely to the support of the international community.

The types of armed forces engaged in the conflict from 1999 were many and diverse. Apart from the regular military and security forces (FDS, and later the FRCI), and the international peacekeeping forces – the UN peacekeeping force ONUCI and its French counterpart Licorne – there were mercenaries, (gangs of) thugs, youth militias, hunter-warriors group (the so-called *dozos*), ad hoc armed youth groups and activist civilians providing shelter and food for the various combatants.

Although estimates vary widely and (will) remain extremely difficult to make, one may posit that up to 40,000 people, mainly youngsters, were active in so-called parallel forces on both sides of the conflict. An estimated 25,000 of them belonged to the pro-Gbagbo patriotic militias. The latter emerged in late 2002/early 2003 within widely differing contexts of local and national mobilization. Although the large majority of the militia members waited for their official demobilization and disarmament until the end of 2009, many were active in military operations only prior to 2005 and only for a couple of months in total.

With a few notable exceptions, the operations in which the patriotic self-defence groups participated were of limited military significance. Ironically perhaps, but quite typical for the Ivorian situation, militia organizations were mostly established in the aftermath of the early decisive combats in the west (Chelpi-den Hamer 2011), and anticipated post-war registration and so-called communal reinsertion programmes which began to materialize in a haphazard way from 2009 onwards. All this time many remained mobilized or kept in contact with their units and commanders while attending to other activities. As we will see in more detail below, throughout the short decade of political-military conflict (2002–11), the patriotic militias were the locus of extensive networking and, to the extent that this was informed by political or ideological choices, vast enterprises of civil society building. On the latter dimension of militia formation I have written elsewhere (Arnaut 2008b, 2008c). In this chapter, I focus more on its social dimension: the intricate processes of networking and the emergence of subaltern Big Men in the form of militia leaders. After all, the post-war, or rather pre-peace, multiplication of militias and their growing impact on social and political life constituted a protracted, multifaceted and multi-sited process, which this chapter tries to begin to disentangle in terms of social mobility of a juvenile and subaltern kind.

Military triangulations

The dynamics of expansion, dissemination and mobility of militias in southern Côte d'Ivoire during the preceding decade had at least three dimensions: (a) the flexibility of militia members as regards their resourcefulness and entrepreneurship, (b) the changeability of militia structures within strategies of clientelism and low-key elite formation, and (c) the proximity to the regular defence and security forces. The latter are commonly referred to as *le(s) corps habillé(s)*, meaning 'corps in uniform' (literally, 'the dressed-up corps'), and comprise several categories of uniform-wearing, arms-carrying civil servants: police, state police (*gendarmes*), specialized police units (such as environmental police), army and customs (*douanes*). By 'proximity' to the *corps habillés*, I mean either the latter's physical co-presence during training, on the front lines, and in various sites and schemes of 'violent labour', or their omnipresence in the aspirations of the youngsters – as holders of secure employment and as icons of social success. As we will see at the end of this chapter, this proximity situates the *corps habillés* and the militias in a common 'field'. Theorizing this will allow us to get a firmer grip on youth, their social mobility and networking as dimensions of subaltern agency in times of crisis and violent conflict. But first, we need to grasp the basic entangled dynamic of militia members, their chiefs and patrons.

Coming back to the issue of militia mobility, 'General' Ato Belly was definitely a stationary type, both geographically and in terms of militia membership, but that did not make his calculations about his own and his fellow militiamen's social mobility any less judicious. Ato was an Abidjanese local taxi (*woroworo*) driver until in late 2002 he joined the patriotic movement. In early 2003 he joined the Abidjan-based GPP militia and remained active in its networks until his death. Within the GPP Ato played a central role in successive attempts to establish camps (*cantonnements*) in Abidjan. He took the lead in transforming the girls' school Institut Marie-Thérèse into a GPP barracks. Between August 2004 and March 2005 this camp, branded the First Battalion of Commando Legionnaires (1er BCL), housed up to four hundred youngsters. Much later, in mid-2007, Ato made another successful attempt to accommodate several hundred militiamen who were out on the streets of Abidjan after having been chased from their camps and from the police and gendarme barracks in which they had been housed for several months. This time around, Ato chose the deserted run-down Hotel Akwaba along the Abidjan beach as his self-styled 'naval' base – located in Vridi, the neighbourhood where Ato was raised and spent most of his life. According to Ato, his sustained attempts to muster and accommodate his ex-combatants were meant to keep up their public visibility in anticipation of announced demobilization and reinsertion schemes. However, as we will see presently, given the inveterate uncertainty of these programmes, militiamen also bet on other horses.

Both from the Akwaba 'naval' base (until it was dismantled in November 2008) and, even more so, from the above-mentioned First BCL camp in Adjamé, Ato observed and supported the to-and-fro movements of 'his' troops. On an individual basis or in groups of variable size (also called *gbôhi*), combatants were seizing all sorts of opportunities to valorize their 'violent labour' (Hoffman 2011) or other skills. In between answering one call or another for support on the front lines, they carried out often very short-term contract work in as diverse areas as construction work and development projects, but mostly in security and vigilantism in very different sectors such as transport (or transport regulation) and politics.

While serving as a dispatching centre for thousands of militia members in different war sites in the interior, the GPP in Abidjan increasingly fragmented. While in action along the so-called front lines, GPP members formed new groups and networks which on return to Abidjan did not (fully) reintegrate into the parent organization. These new networks, referred to as *gbôhi*, sometimes took the form of new militia fractions with new leaders who proclaimed themselves 'general' or 'commander'. Such was the case of the CNLB of Watchard Kédjébo, the FLP of Oliverson le Zoulou, and the GCLCI of Jimmy Willy, to name only three.[3] The clearing of their only centralizing camp at the Institut Marie-Thérèse and the relative failure of subsequent camps such as the ones at Azito (Yopougon) and Biabou II (Abobo), as well as the aforementioned camp at Vridi (Port-Bouët), reinforced this process of disintegration which, in turn, was countered by subsequent attempts to regroup the militia factions. These federalizing attempts were either undertaken by long-standing GPP leaders such as President Bouazo Yoko Yoko Bernard or 'Chief of the Defence Staff' Jeff Fada, or by newcomers with relevant resources in the form of political contacts and financial means. Such was the case of 'General' Jimmy Willy, who capitalized on his contacts with Gbagbo's FPI (Ivorian Popular Front) party in order to create the very influential federation Union of Self-defence Groups from the South (UMAS).[4]

From the above description one can already infer that the fragmentation of militias was not only the outcome of grassroots militia mobility and networking but also of intervention 'from above' – *in casu*, of sustained attempts by political and military entrepreneurs to raise militias or federations thereof and become officially recognized as their chiefs. The general dynamics of the Ivorian patriotic activism in general and militancy in particular are those of mobility, of fission and fusion. These processes started within days of the outbreak of the conflict in September 2002 and, as far as we can discern, are still going on in the post-conflict period with militia leaders repositioning themselves and building new constituencies in the peace process. If Eugène Djué is now (May 2011) a figurehead of the reconciliation of patriotic militias with the new Ouattara regime, it is mainly due to his more or less consolidated status as

a Big Man of patriotic militantism: in order to mark his senior position as a militia paramount chief among the many militia 'generals', he labelled himself 'marshal' (Arnaut 2006).

Further to this point, it is significant that the GPP, the self-declared 'mother of all patriotic militias', is itself the offshoot of an earlier patriotic organization, the UPLTCI (Union des Patriotes pour la Libération Totale de la Côte d'Ivoire), created by Eugène Djué in the immediate aftermath of the September 2002 insurgency. Almost at the same time, Djué's fellow former student leader and competitor in patriotic activism Charles Blé Goudé created the eventually hegemonic patriotic federation the Alliance des Jeunes Patriotes pour le Sursaut National. When, after a couple of months, Charles Groguhet and Touré Moussa Zéguen left Djué's activist UPLTCI and founded their own, more belligerent and instantly very popular, GPP militia, both Goudé and Djué recruited some of the GPP's trained combatants, while at the same time trying to incorporate the GPP and other organizations into their respective patriotic federations. The same double operation of patronage underlies the overall dynamics of the patriotic militias: (a) emerging patrons trying to draw together networks of adventurous and peripatetic juvenile militants (from below) while (b) capturing through federation (from above) the networks that escape their control.

In order to illustrate how the above processes were also at work in other militias, but above all in order to introduce the aspect of the proximity of *corps habillés* as the third factor of militia dynamics, I introduce another character, a militia member called 'Marcus Garvey'. His case, in combination with that of Ato Belly, provides the core empirical ground for further theorizing subaltern mobility and networking in conflict situations.

'Marcus Garvey', networker and 'Nouchi'

Like Ato Belly, 'Marcus Garvey' took up arms again in the tragic finale of post-electoral conflict, after having been demobilized or waiting to be demobilized for almost seven years. Also like Ato Belly, Marcus Garvey saw himself very much as part of the so-called reserve pool or support base (*base arrière*) of the FDS, not by dispatching 'violent labour' or by accommodating its 'labourers' in barracks (as Ato Belly did) but by executing such violent labour first as a combatant and later as the foreman (*chef de dispositif*) of a group engaged in security operations. In sum, both Ato and Garvey were Big Men of sorts, managing a network (*gbôhi*) of (ex-)combatants around them. Of both their networks nothing much is presently left: Ato's *gbôhi* has lost its leader (and in all probability most of its members), while Garvey's is entirely dispersed, reduced to a dozen friends trying to keep in touch by mobile phone.

In March 2003, at the age of twenty-eight, Garvey left Abidjan, where he was born and raised, in order to join the western front near Guiglo. After a stay of about eight months, during which he was enrolled by the FLGO (Front for the

Liberation of the Great West) militia, Garvey was flown home in the company of exactly 677 Abidjan-based FLGO recruits. Following a short stay-cum-forced-removal at the Akouédo army camp, half of the returnees, including Garvey, took up residence in the vicinity of the camp, in the unfinished houses of a gigantic building site on the outskirts of Abidjan called Lauriers. Later on, for about seven months (November 2004–May 2005) Garvey ran a large-scale vigilante operation around the radio and TV transmitting station of Abobo (northern Abidjan) in collaboration with the FDS. For this, he employed, according to himself, more than two hundred (ex-)combatants, most of whom belonged to his already unravelling *gbôhi* at Lauriers. One year on, Garvey returned to Guiglo, where he associated himself with the MILOCI (Ivorian Movement for the Liberation of the West of Côte d'Ivoire) militia, which, in the meantime, had won a certain notoriety and was first in line to receive demobilization fees. In late 2008, after more than two years in Guiglo waiting fruitlessly to be demobilized, Garvey returned to Abidjan and joined what was left of his *gbôhi* at Lauriers. As before (2003–04), he and his dispirited gang survived on small jobs, mostly in building, security or petty trade, until the violent denouement of the post-electoral crisis made him and the remaining sixty members of his group take up arms again.

On 3 March 2011 Garvey got hold of an AK-47 rifle from one of the many deserting trainees at the Gendarmerie School and joined the armed forces who were defending the residence of the incumbent President Gbagbo at Cocody. When, one week later, heavy UN and French bombardments destroyed the entire defence infrastructure around the presidential residence, and the arrest of Gbagbo was imminent, Garvey abandoned the battle. He also walked out on what was left of his *gbôhi*, most of whom had decided to continue the struggle from the marine base at Yopougon, seconding the notoriously intrepid marine forces loyal to Gbagbo. Two months after this naval base was 'pacified' by national and international forces, in April 2011; only two members of Garvey's *gbôhi* have returned home. As before, Garvey now (May 2011) shares a squat in a storage container with his old mate Aubin (who was too ill to partake in the recent fighting). Garvey's girlfriend, who takes care of their three-year-old daughter, has been refusing to join her partner in this makeshift abode.

Having no proper job, no proper house and no family in whose midst he resides, Garvey labels himself a 'noussi'. Going against the standard spelling of 'Nouchi', which refers to a broad category of (juvenile) urban vagrants and their slang (de Latour 2001; Newell 2009a), Garvey employs an idiosyncratic etymology to stress the word's composition from the French morphemes '*nous*' (we) and '*si*' (if), while explaining that: 'We the unemployed, we the students who have diplomas but no jobs, we, children whom the street has given birth to without checking into the maternity hospital, it is us; if you could accept us in your society without too many *arrière-pensées* about us.'

This passage, in which Garvey tries to grasp the predicament of his exclusion from mainstream society, is an excerpt from one of his many writings, which total about 350 pages of manuscript telling of his life during the 2002–11 violent conflict. His story, as well as that of Ato (which is enshrined in about eight hours of recorded interviews), forms the core of the empirical basis for exploring what I have called the proximity of the *corps habillés* as a first step towards addressing the central questions of subaltern mobility and networking in times of conflict.[5]

Corps habillés

The relationship between the youth militias and the *corps habillés* during the 2002–11 conflict in Côte d'Ivoire entails (a) the latter's physical co-presence during training, on the front lines, and in various other sites and schemes of 'violent labour', and (b) their importance in the imagination of youngsters as icons of successful people with a (potentially) honourable profession, secure employment and a flourishing social life. This does not mean that youth militia members have an unqualified admiration for the *corps habillés*. Rather, the relationship between militia members and their professional counterparts is riddled with ambiguity.

Reading through the writings of Marcus Garvey, it is difficult to miss the fact that, as for so many of his fellow combatants, proximity to the army is the alpha and omega of his engagement with militias. In the first pages of his war journal, Garvey reports a short conversation with a friend which instantly made him volunteer for the patriotic battle. When informing Garvey that an organization was being set up in order to dispatch youngsters to the front lines, the friend explained its modus operandi as follows: 'You go, they train you, they drop you off on the battle front in order to fight alongside the FANCI [Ivorian regular army] and after the war, they put you in the army, at least those who survived' (Garvey 2011: 7).

The plausibility of this causal link between militia membership and entry into the regular army largely followed from the appeals of popular politicians in the early months after the insurgency of 2002, calling on youngsters to join the regular army, which was diagnosed as ageing, depleted, disheartened and in urgent need of reinforcement. Officially in late 2002 about three thousand of those who volunteered were incorporated into the army while thousands of rejected youngsters kept roaming the streets and public places of Abidjan for several months, hoping fruitlessly to become part of future recruitment campaigns. That is where the process of militia formation took off.

Once they were incorporated in one or other self-defence group based either in Abidjan or on the front lines in central and western Côte d'Ivoire, these volunteers immediately came into direct contact with members or former members (either retired or dismissed) of the *corps habillés*. Among the earliest

recruits of the GPP were a group of sixty-five marines who had recently been dismissed for insubordination (Njabehi 18/6/2008; Shao 4/4/2009).[6] Rather than becoming plain militia combatants, most (ex-)members of the FDS took more responsible positions and acted as trainers and coaches, exceptionally as militia leaders and in a few cases also as gatekeepers. In all, members of the *corps habillés* occupied vital positions in the intricate patronage structure surrounding the militias.

With few notable exceptions, such as that of 'Commander' Nahui Lazare, leader of the self-defence group MI-24, who was an ex-member of the Ivorian army (Nahui 26/3/2009), (former) soldiers and policemen acted most often as coaches and trainers of the militia groups. To start with the former category, the late Koré Moïse, alias 'Ministre de la Défense', was a military officer effectively attached to the Ministry of Defence, who acted as a coach to the GPP leadership during the first years of the conflict (2002–05) (Ato 25/3/2009; Saintgbal 21/3/2008; Delta and Assoumou 3/4/2009). A typical example of a trainer is 'Colonel' Zagbayou, who was a sergeant of the Ivorian army. In Abidjan he was one of the GPP's most important trainers from the very early days (Lago 8/4/2009; Njabehi 18/6/2008). Zagbayou continued his training of militia volunteers in Yopougon into the post-electoral crisis, and even ended up fighting alongside his trainees until the final days of patriotic resistance to Ouattara's election (*Le Patriote*, 11 January 2011; *Times Live*, 30 April 2011). On the western front sergeants like Koulaï Roger and Oulaï Delafosse played a similar role. Unlike Zagbayou, who appeared to have had good connections with the presidency, Koulaï and Delafosse were detached by their respective superiors, Colonel Oulé Yedess and General Denis Bombet, to train and coach the FLGO recruits. Importantly, higher officers such as Yedess and Bombet were less patrons than gatekeepers. As Big Men of the armed forces they warranted the temporary permeability of the military sector for enterprising and zealous youngsters. In this role the military gatekeepers were endorsed by political Big Men-cum-agitators such as presidential security councillor Kadet Bertin and patriotic youth leader Charles Blé Goudé, who regularly proclaimed the state's receptivity to juvenile input for its *corps habillés.* In fact, Bertin's and Blé Goudé's rapid rise to national prominence in itself indexed the new possibilities for youngsters. On top of the politicians who made public appeals, there were those whose occasional public encouragement of youthful patriotic activism was complemented by moral, material and financial support for certain militias. Among these sponsors featured members of parliament of Gbagbo's FPI party, such as Nko Marcel and William Attéby, and fellow party member Geneviève Bro Grébé, president of the patriotic women's organisation (Ato 26/2/2010; Bouazo 19/3/2008). Together, the military gatekeepers as much as the politicians and propagandists who either represented or supported the militant youngsters inscribed the militias into the larger story of the emergent

'rejuvenation of the nation' under President Gbagbo by showing them concrete pathways leading from militias into the military and by extension the *corps habillés* (see Arnaut 2005).

More concretely, it is no exaggeration to say that all ex-combatants of the self-defence groups I have spoken to could name at least one member of the *corps habillés* who was involved in their training or in important military operations in which they partook (such as Dignité or Léopard). Moreover, many of the militia members spent some time in military precincts on the front lines or in Abidjan. In and around Abidjan the prestigious marine base of Adiaké and the spacious 1st Battalion camp at Akouédo were important sites in that respect, and so were the two so-called war schools of Abidjan: the Ecole de Police and the Ecole de Gendarmerie (e.g. Guéï, KRR and Ato 10/4/2009). In all of these places militia members received extremely variable treatment – a puzzling alternation between being glorified and being humiliated, being nurtured and accommodated one moment and starved and chased at gunpoint the next. As we will see presently, a similar ambivalence was at play in the core signifier of the *corps habillés*: the uniform, which could connote dignity and righteousness as much as cowardice and travesty.

One of the central items of proximity between the *corps habillés* and patriotic militias was the outfit they wore. References and anecdotes relating to the uniform or battledress (*treillis*), including the shoulder marks (*galons*), beret (*beret*), boots (*rangers* or *rénaux*) and belt (*ceinturon*), crop up in almost any conversation with ex-combatants. This is also the case in Garvey's autobiography. Merely four months after his arrival on the western front line, he reports that militia members from Guiglo went out demonstrating half naked in military drill (*pas-gym*) while chanting 'Give us uniforms.'[7] This incident heralded ever-growing tensions between the militia rank and file on the one hand and its leadership and the *corps habillés* units at Guiglo on the other. Eventually, as mentioned, this resulted in the deportation of more than six hundred FLGO youngsters to Abidjan in early October 2003. Also, as I explain below, this event exemplarily revealed the broader meaning of 'dressing up' in the context of the Ivorian conflict and the participation of militant youngsters in it.

To 'dress up the militia members' (*habiller les éléments*) does not simply mean providing them with uniforms or authorizing them to wear them, but falls nothing short of giving them official employment, including registration, monthly salary, healthcare and pension schemes, etc. That is what Sergeant Koulaï Roger, the FLGO's main trainer and Yedess's aide-de-camp, referred to when in response to the nude *pas-gym* he promised that his trainees would all 'be dressed', while several months later, just days before their deportation to Abidjan, he broke down in tears, admitting: 'I have lied to you, you will not be dressed here' (Garvey 2011: 21). This strongly indicates that the militia's

focus on uniforms is much more than a (juvenile) obsession with outward appearance. As we will see presently, apart from considering the uniform as indexing a potentially critical move regarding social mobility, for its aficionados it also functioned as a marker of moral distinction.

As could be expected, the military leadership gave preference to its regular troops when it came to the distribution of battledresses and equipment. Garvey reports on the frustration this sometimes caused among his fellow FLGO members, but while explaining this he also provides us with some clues as to how this combines with a more general disdain for the FDS's (in)significance in the maintenance of public order in a front-line city like Guiglo. During the rainy season of 2003, he writes: 'The policeman at his roadblock could sleep throughout, the gendarme commuted between the Mini Shop bar and his desk, while the soldier was busy managing his women's business when he wasn't attending to the roadblock.' In order to measure the degree of Garvey's low esteem for all three categories of the *corps habillés*, it is important to know that not only was drinking at the Mini Shop and flirting considered to be of little benefit to national security, but also hanging around the office was despised as a futile wartime activity, and occupying a roadblock even more so. This is also explained by Ato Belly (25/3/2009), who, in a long narrative about the day he decided to abandon his job as a taxi driver in order to 'liberate his country', insulted the policemen who approached him at the central junction (*le grand carrefour*) of Abidjan's important commune of Koumassi: 'I told them: this country is dying and you are here busy racketeering along the road; one asks us to go and liberate Bouaké, you have the required arms but you use them to force taxis to stop.' The fact that, as a taxi driver, Ato had been undergoing the racketeering-at-gunpoint of these police officers for many years certainly added to his frustration and to the ferocity of his scolding. However, it is probably not so much the practice of roadside racketeering itself at which Ato took offence – after all, that was also one of the militias' favourite activities – but the fact that the *corps habillés*' arrogance towards helpless citizens masked a proven lack of courage when it came to facing an armed adversary. This was also exemplified in the way the FDS dealt with their uniforms.

The most obvious sign of the cowardice among the FDS was what 'General' Ato Belly witnessed in 2002–03 as much as in 2011: imminent attacks by rebel forces were preceded by massive desertions. As Ato experienced on 31 March 2011 at the national radio and television site, these desertions began with a hasty change of clothes. In 2003 Richard and Eric (10/4/2009), two members of Ato Belly's *gbôhi*, identified this as the reason for their own recruitment into a special commando to attack a rebel stronghold near Daloa: the FDS who were stationed there 'had taken fright, they undressed ... they took their rifles and threw them away, they put on civilian clothes and fled'. Consequently thirty-five GPP members such as themselves and fifteen professional commando

troops from Akouédo formed a new commando which received the same red (marines') berets, the same uniform and the same weapons – for Richard and Eric a source of profound job satisfaction.

Finally, uniforms were a way of distinguishing oneself not only from the non-uniformed civil servants or from civilians, but also from different armed units, and most of all from enemy troops. Recounting his admission to the GPP, Ato explains that he feared confusion and infiltration when he observed that GPP militia members were dressed in the same way as the rebels he had seen on TV: wearing no proper boots (*rangers*) but plastic sandals (*lèke*), and merely uniform trousers plus T-shirt (*bas treillis*) (Ato Belly 7/6/2008).[8] As the late GPP 'general' Shango (14/6/2008) explains, dressing up like the rebels was sometimes part of the tactics used mainly on the western front (see Utas and Jörgel 2008 for parallels). In other circumstances, wearing the full uniform was indispensable and an important part of the military etiquette. During the military crisis of November 2004, Ato Belly (26/2/2010) explains, his troops started seconding the elite Republican Guards to assist in their task of defending the presidential residence. The way Ato recounts it, the trustworthiness and the dedication of both groups as expressed in their sharing full dress (*treillis complet*) warranted the fraternal co-presence of both formal and informal armed forces. This brings us to the 'social' dimension of the relationship between both groups.

Militia members generally refer to the *corps habillés* as their 'elder brothers' (*grands frères*). This relationship carries the full ambiguity of their rapport: it combines familiarity with respect and, at times, resentment, which in practice underlies their mutual complicity as much as inequality and the militia's subjugation. The deep sense of complicity is well illustrated by, for instance, a whole series of mutual engagements with the FDS, which Garvey reports in his writings. One typical example relates to the arrangements for the roadblocks or checkpoints (*corridors*) and patrols (*patrouilles*) which Garvey and his *gbôhi* set up in the vicinity of the transmitting station of Abobo during the time they were responsible for its protection. At four so-called passageways (*corridors*) members of Garvey's group undertook the rather lucrative activity of checking the identity papers and luggage of passers-by while taking bribes from them. By doing this they entered into direct competition with the surrounding *corps habillés*, who were happy to be cut in on the deal. 'The elder brothers agreed,' Garvey (2011: 90) notes with satisfaction.

At certain dramatic moments this complicity between militias and the military was reversed by the latter, who used their power and position to discipline or punish their 'younger brothers'. In late 2006 and early 2007 more than three hundred GPP youngsters experienced this during their time at the aforementioned Abidjanese war schools. While initially the militias were well received there, the relationship rapidly deteriorated in the run-up to the March 2007 Ouagadougou peace accord, and resulted in the militia members being

chased at gunpoint from their guest abode. However humiliating such forced evacuations and other reprimands were, they were sometimes glossed over as the legitimate right of 'elder brothers' to correct or admonish their younger siblings (Delta and Assouma 3/4/2009). Finally, such reprimands were all the more humiliating when they involved uniforms. When in November 2008 Ato Belly's so-called naval base at Vridi was evacuated by the chief of staff, General Philippe Mangou, himself, the sad climax was that all uniforms, boots and military gear were put on one big stack and set alight in the presence of television cameras (Ato Belly 25/3/2009). In spite of deeply traumatic events such as these and other camp evacuations, many militia members maintained the desire to join the military one day. Such tenacity requires our theoretical attention, presently.

Subaltern mobility: going in circles?

The above detailed description of the complex and ambivalent relationship between the military and the militias through the prism of *corps habillés* allows us to safely speculate that for militia members FDS uniforms and military gear were important markers of a prospective transition process which could lead into the heart of the *corps habillés*. Such a process starts, quite plainly, with a change of clothes, as described in graphic terms by the late GPP 'commander' Roger Njabehi (26/3/2009): 'because we were civilians, we had to put on a military uniform ... in order to help the military ... and the military were aware of that, and the gendarmes were also aware of that: that these kids there are helping us; so we are going to fight along with you, "dress them", and they have dressed us'. However, as we know now, with the exception of a few lucky ones, thousands saw their military dreams unfulfilled for some time (Banégas 2008).

The magnitude of this disillusion is certainly proportional to the recursivity of the false promises expressed by many important political and military entrepreneurs, and at critical moments echoed by the militia leaders themselves in a desperate attempt to keep their *gbôhi* mobilized and rallied behind them. However, the impact of these messages 'from above' must be qualified by considering the tactics 'from below' – the sustained attempts by youngsters to infiltrate the *corps habillés* in spite of the successive disillusionments and even downright rejections over a period of many years. For many of the militia members, as for Ato Belly and Marcus Garvey, these disillusionments repeated themselves over a period of eight long years and ended some time in March 2011, in a decisive if not fatal bid to enter the *corps habillés*. By then the latter were perceived as stripped of the weak, the cowards and the impostors who, in an ultimate *démasqué*, had abandoned their battledresses. The militia members' adherence to the uniforms in itself became a demonstration of their unabated loyalty and the proof that they deserved what they had been asking for since day one: 'being dressed'.

In the remainder of this chapter, I want to further explore the effects and, above all, the mechanisms of these tactics of impersonation within broader frames of apprenticeship, on-the-job training and social mobility. As a starting point, it is important to be aware that the youngsters were somehow conscious of the fact that by putting on some military garb and hanging about in the vicinity of the *corps habillés* they were playing a big game, with all the ambiguity that came with it. Near the end of 2007, after yet another six months of waiting for the demobilization and reintegration programme in Guiglo to resume, Garvey noted:

> I am 32 years old, it is true that without having served in the army, I have served in the army. I have frequented it so much that I can claim I was with it, this army, it is beautiful, impressive but hypocrite and treacherous. When I recall the words of sergeant Koulaï Roger I feel myself suffering, regretting. I still see him sobbing, telling us that he merely executed orders. That makes me feel like throwing up: to offer hopes of beauty and of strength, and shatter these in such a hypocritical way. In one word, I have walked alongside this beauty, this imposing and betraying hypocrite and I have come to detest it in the end. (Garvey 2011)

The central metaphor of this paragraph – companionship – provides some guidance for starting to devise an analytical framework for subaltern (social) mobility in times of crisis. Garvey looks back on a trajectory in which he became entangled with the army, learned much about it, but never really became part of it, never fully inhabited the corps he so eagerly wanted to belong to. Instead, in phrases such as 'I was *with* it' (my emphasis), Garvey positions himself as a (travelling) companion of the army. This matches the general theme of his autobiography, which he entitles 'The Companion', and in which he addresses the reader throughout as 'my companion'. Companionship has at least two strings of meanings which relate to social mobility and networking respectively. In the realm of social mobility, the companionship implies an enduring situation of initiation or apprenticeship without ever reaching full proficiency. Garvey sees himself lingering in a situation of truncated mastery which for some time constitutes a source of hope but eventually also of desperation. Equally so in the realm of networking – the enduring co-travelling produces 'company' in many forms, albeit mainly of a rather ephemeral and cursory nature. The companions of the army and *corps habillés* in their capacity as elder brothers have a large stake in regulating the seesaw movement of nearing (complicity) and distancing (subjugation) between the militia dilettantes and the properly 'dressed' FDS professionals. Furthermore, militia members seek the company of friends or *'compagnons de route'* and more often than not consider themselves as belonging to a *gbôhi*. Although at certain times the *gbôhi* can be a strong locus of identification and solidarity,

it has very permeable boundaries and is in constant flux as people join and leave. Finally, militia activity creates conduits to the bigger world of national politics, magistrature and top-level administration. The web of military and political patronage surrounding the self-defence groups in Côte d'Ivoire in the preceding decade resulted both in occasional contacts and short- or long-term contracts between members of both realms. Having addressed Gbagbo directly in the course of a protest action was a source of pride for Marcus Garvey, as much as it was a source of prestige for Ato Belly to have met the army chief of staff, Philippe Mangou, on several occasions. More durable and lucrative were the special operations or long-term bodyguard contracts for politicians, judges or top-level civil servants which certain militia members were able to secure for themselves and their *gbôhi*. A good example of this was the two-month contract Ato Belly concluded with the Mauritanian ambassador in February 2011 whereby he and a dozen of his 'elements' protected the embassy and the hundreds of Mauritanian refugees it accommodated at that time.

In all, the networking as much as the on-the-job training of militia apprenticeship was rather shallow and elusive, and, for the large majority of the militia members, never resulted in full mastery, a stable professional or patronage network, or a far-reaching identification with the coveted *corps habillés*. Instead, the relationship with the latter largely boiled down to a fascination for what Garvey calls its 'beauty and strength' – that is, its outward appearance epitomized by the uniforms and paraphernalia, and its strength indexed by the firearms and the direct impact of carrying weapons in public. Thus, in spite of their tenacity and dedication, militia members remained forever 'outside' and hierarchically 'below' the army 'corps' – enduringly peripheral and subaltern. Any further theorizing should start from here.

Incrementalism, impersonation and the field

Tens of thousands of youngsters who try to supplement the state's *corps habillés* can be taken as an instance of what AbdouMaliq Simone describes as 'incrementalism' (Simone 2008a: 17). In his usage, this refers to the gradual albeit sometimes rapid process of haphazard extension in the construction of houses, markets and other urban infrastructures (ibid.: 16). When applied to institutional contexts such as the *corps habillés*, incrementalism alerts us to the proliferation of 'state'; what Aretxaga (2003: 369) identifies as 'an excess of statehood practices: too many actors competing to perform as state'. This enables us to further develop the idea launched in the introduction to this volume, that the absence of the state in Africa leaves voids that are filled by entrepreneurs of different sorts. 'Incrementalism' does not start from possible voids but from the supplementing or multiplying of operations in the vicinity of state institutions, which may either condense and extend them or drain them and trim them down. As one of Hibou's seminal texts on state transformation

– in accord with founding texts such as that of Bayart (Bayart et al. 1999) and Reno (1995) – points out, the privatization of the state does not simply concern its '*décharge*' (discharge) but also its '*dédoublement*' (duplication/multiplication) by way of the 'intensive use of intermediaries' (Hibou 1999: 13–14). More recent studies in domains as diverse as administration (Blundo 2006) and conflict transformation (Engel and Mehler 2005; Mehler 2009; Menkhaus 2008) show the empirical potential of exploring this multiplication or refraction, resulting in the creation of vast terrains of hybrid state-related activity. The mediation that takes place there falls within the formal/informal networks evoked in the introduction to this volume. The networks described in the preceding sections of this chapter consist of *gbôhi* and militia structures with shifting degrees of formality as well as the patron networks that surround them. Central nodes in these hybrid mediating structures are Big Men of different scales and weight who occupy equally ambivalent positions in transition zones between state and non-state activity.

In order to understand such zones of state mediation it is important not only to acknowledge the pull factors of state '*décharge*': formal (guided by, say, the World Bank or the Washington Consensus) as well as informal privatization. The obvious 'push factors' of state mediation are youth unemployment or, more generally, lack of opportunities. This situation has been rightly identified as 'social death' (Vigh 2006) or 'blockage' – as a lack of mobility and opportunities 'to keep the options open' (Simone 2008b). The (auto)biographies of Ato Belly and Marcus Garvey offer us a certain insight into the tactics of setting out on a voyage that could open the possibility of entering the composite state institution of the *corps habillés*. The tactical movements of the militant youngsters take place in the vague terrain situated between a state-in-crisis which is outsourcing its military force and a vast group of youngsters engaged in what Mitchell (2007) would perhaps call a 'counter-inscription of the state'. In sum, it seems proper to suggest that the main juvenile tactics, those of impersonation and dressing up, are above all an 'art of being in between' (De Certeau 1984: 30). Like '*la perruque*' – De Certeau's *locus classicus* of the subaltern tactics of the detour: the diversion of labour time in government and commercial administrations as much as in factories – the militia activity of so many militant Ivorian youngsters during the past decade can best be understood as a sustained 'act of camouflage, of counterfeit and make believe' (ibid.: 37) aimed at helping them insinuate themselves into the state and its institutions.

These provisional remarks on impersonation are meant to indicate that we are dealing with a particularly complex phenomenon which requires the kind of empirical and theoretical grounding which this chapter is merely able to begin to provide. After all, we need to account for the reflexive dialectics involved in dressing up (from below) and being dressed up (from above), or, more broadly,

in the appropriation and registering of forms, types and postures which circulate within the urban, national and transnational Ivorian space – to the extent that, in themselves, these forms come to stand for circulation, (social) mobility and advancement in life. Any proper interpretation of impersonation as a subaltern tactic must avoid slipping into simplistic, supremacist, if not downright (neo)colonialist conceptions of subaltern mimicry (Apter 1999; and see Fabian 2002; Ferguson 2002).

The broader empirical grounding for juvenile impersonation in patriotic militantism and activism in Côte d'Ivoire must be sought within popular culture and popular politics (see also McGovern 2011), which in the preceding decades had been vested in new urban culture, sometimes labelled 'Nouchi'. To describe the success of Nouchi in Ivorian public life over the last two decades is beyond the scope of this chapter. It suffices to situate the expansion of Nouchi street culture in the period of fast urbanization of the 1980s, and, most importantly, its take-up by the student 'revolutionary' movements of the 1990s. This, in turn, led to the introduction of street culture and discourse into opposition politics, mainly in the hands of the leftist FPI party and its leader Laurent Gbagbo; and, when the latter came to power in 2000, to its sedimentation in mainstream politics (Arnaut 2005, 2008a). By and large, what many Ivorians seem to observe in politics is comparable to what Newell (2009b) describes as 'bluff' in economic and sexual exchange in Abidjanese urban street culture, and what before him Banégas and Warnier (2001: 8) identified as 'mischievousness, astuteness, [and] the right of the strongest ... in a moral economy of shrewdness and "débrouille"'. What makes the bluff particularly interesting is 'the incorporation of deceitful illusion and illocutionary performance into economic transactions, gender roles, and claims to modernity' (Newell 2009b: 384). Very important for our purposes is the fact that in typical bluff settings none of the participants is completely fooled: 'It was at once based on the idea of deception and prestige of illusion, yet at the same time no one was fooled, the audience was aware of the hoax before the show even began. And yet, everyone acted as though the bluff were real' (ibid.: 385). In conclusion, Newell (ibid.: 385) claims: 'the audience's awareness of fakery was irrelevant, it was the aptitude for artifice that earns respect and praise, and had transformative potential'.

The politician who embodied this 'aptitude for artifice' most cogently was President Gbagbo, the Biggest Man in the country at the time, in his capacity as 'the baker' (*le boulanger*), who, according to the French expression to which this epithet refers, 'rolls everyone in flour' (*il roule tout le monde dans la farine*) – that is, takes everyone (his colleagues, and his opponents as much as his electorate) for a ride. However, if streetwise bluffing is a youth competency, so are its political and activist variants. One of the most flagrant instances of juvenile political 'bluff' was the so-called 'Versailles Accord' signed in July 2006 by 'warring' youth leaders such as Charles Blé Goudé and Karamoko

Yayoro six months before the senior politicians signed a new peace agreement at Ouagadougou. Adding to the 'artifice' was the fact that 'Versailles' in the aforementioned accord did not refer to the French town where the post-First World War peace agreement was signed, but to Café de Versailles, a bar-restaurant in a posh part of Abidjan owned by Ivorian reggae superstar Alpha Blondy. The juvenile 'Versailles Accord' had all the makings of a successful 'fakery': a peace accord named after a world historical event, discussed in a trendy Abidjanese pub by youth leaders who not only impersonated senior national and international negotiators and simulated the drafting and signing of the peace agreement, but who also anticipated the latter and, thus, imposed themselves as political players to be reckoned with.

The well-frequented popular parliaments were another example of youthful political bluff involving more than a handful of junior political leaders. The flippant use of 'Versailles' resembled in this respect the use of 'La Sorbonne' as the name of Abidjan's most notorious people's parliament. 'La Sorbonne' was created in Abidjan's administrative centre (Le Plateau) in the 1980s and served as a model for hundreds of other popular parliaments set up since 2000 (Bahi 2003, 2004: 59; Yao Gnabeli 2005). Like the renowned Parisian university, to which they relate through the Abidjanese 'La Sorbonne', the many parliaments employed self-styled 'professors' who delivered 'scientific' analyses, thus claiming some sort of 'open university' status for their political propaganda (Atchoua 2008; Bahi 2001: 159). A final example of juvenile activist 'bluffing' is that which took place on a grand scale in the urban militias and the southern youth militant groups in general. As we have seen, the simulations of 'real' military life were manifold and pertained to matters of rank, outfit and attire, and, of course, activities. Among these the use of military titles by the GPP leadership was the most flagrant, since not only did GPP members recognize them but also civilians and the FDS acknowledged them publicly, whether in tongue-in-cheek fashion or more or less seriously – depending on the power balance at the moment of interaction (Arnaut 2006).

Lastly, in a recent paper Newell (2009a) invites us to situate impersonation and 'bluff' at the very heart of Nouchi culture. Bluffing, he argues, as the appropriation of alterity, is also central to the urban slang called Nouchi. Taking most of its lexical material from French, Nouchi also incorporates lexical material from English and a number of national languages such as Dyula, Baule and Bété. By dethroning 'metropolitan' French and venturing into trans-local and transnational linguistic terrains, Nouchi indexes urban cosmopolitism and modernity (ibid.). But there is more to it. Nouchi is in constant flux and its speakers take pride in using the latest new words or even try to introduce them themselves by transferring lexical material from other 'languages' within their repertoires. This is illustrated by Marcus Garvey's autobiography, in which he enriches 'standard' Nouchi with expressions which

he himself identifies as 'military slang' or 'builder's idiom'. Taken together, his repertoires index his 'walks of life': the different sectors of society and of professional activities which he straddles. In other words, his linguistic agility is a function of his (professional) flexibility, and his potential social mobility. Taking our lead from Mbembe (1992; Mbembe and Roitman 1997), who saw the multiplication of identities as a performative tactic in what he calls the post-colony, the impersonating behaviour of Ivorian youngsters can be seen as an attempt to insinuate themselves into different spheres of activity in order 'to keep the options open' (Simone 2008a; Simone 2008b). The ultimate task, which this chapter can merely initiate, is to conceptualize this.

The theoretical frame of the topography and performativity of the kind of juvenile impersonation observed above consists of three related analytical concepts: articulation, navigation and fields.

Taking her lead from Gramsci and Hall, Tania Li (2007: 22) looks at identification as well as the social practice of 'political subjects' in terms of articulation – that is, 'the multiple positions that people occupy, and the diverse powers they encounter'. For research purposes, articulation 'points rather to the necessity of teasing out, historically and ethnographically, the various ways in which room for manoeuvre is present but never unconstrained' (Li 2000: 153). Navigation, as used by Vigh (2008) and Utas (2005; Utas and Jörgel 2008), partly based on Honwana (2000: 77–8) and De Certeau (De Certeau 1984), is precisely conceived in order to account for this 'room for manoeuvre'. Situations of crisis, according to Vigh (2008: 18), 'force agents to take into account not only how they are able to move within a social environment, but also how the social environment moves them, and other agents within it, as they seek to traverse envisioned trajectories'. Navigation implies a dialogical relationship between actors and their social environments; hence more attention needs to be given to the actual constitution of the terrain on which it takes place. Between overstressing stability and predictability and merely characterizing actors' mobility as 'motion within motion' (ibid.), an intermediate position seems possible, acknowledging that flow and fixity constitute each other as much as mobility rests upon structures of immobility (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002; Lien and Melhuus 2007: ix). In order to make this into more than a truism, we need some concept of 'field' without – and here I agree with Vigh – adopting the rather heavy and static concept Bourdieu made of it. Instead, our analyses of tactical agency may profit from a rather open, dynamic notion of field which helps to identify and map 'terrains' in terms of the stakes and opportunities they contain, the competencies they value and the expectation they nourish. Taken as such, a field largely corresponds with Turner's definition of it as 'an ensemble of relationships between actors antagonistically oriented toward the same prizes or values (in this case control over the state apparatus)' (Turner 1974: 135). The dynamic and open nature of such a field

allows us, above all, to register how these fields alter through the incursions of 'navigating' actors – as well as other external interventions (Martin 2003). As far as the identification of fields is concerned, contemporary field theory allows us to define fields rather loosely and according to specific analytical needs, more or less as 'spheres of activity' or 'registers of social action' in the Weberian sense (Lahire 1999), even related to particular social networks (Breiger 2004). In this chapter I have focused mainly on the '*corps habillés*' as a field and ventured into interrelated fields such as popular culture, media and popular politics.

Afterthoughts in lieu of a conclusion

The first months of the new Ouattara administration have witnessed a series of far-going interventions into public space. Within days of taking power, Alassane Ouattara ordered the FRCI to clear out and destroy La Sorbonne, signalling the imminent demise of the dozens of popular parliaments in Abidjan and other urban centres in Côte d'Ivoire. More recently (August 2011), Yopougon saw the demolition of large sections of the Rue Princesse, Abidjan's archetypal nightlife hot spot and breeding ground of world-famous music genres such as Mapouka, Coupé-Décalé and Ivorian rap. The destruction of these sites of popular culture and popular politics makes us realize the extent to which over the last decade public life, at least the pro-Gbagbo part of it, had been flourishing in a novel and vigorous human infrastructure and built environment. Two items of this public culture – generally labelled 'Nouchi' – which rose to prominence and proliferated in many different guises in this milieu were *gbôhi* and 'bluff'.

In this chapter, 'bluff' was presented as a key performative tactic in a broader politics of impersonation of subaltern urbanites concerned with their ever-threatened social mobility. In the hands of the thousands of members of patriotic youth militias, 'bluffing' had the *corps habillés* as its target and took the form of a tenacious and sometimes fatal impersonation of military postures, discourse and practices. The cases of Ato Belly and Marcus Garvey demonstrate how unrewarding this politics of impersonation was and how it merely resulted in a state of enduring apprenticeship without full mastery, or ongoing 'companionship' without a proper 'joining in'. The latter observations bring us to the *gbôhi*, the second important item of urban public life which flourished during the Gbagbo era. *Gbôhi* thrived in Nouchi in the 2000s as a new term for 'gang' derived from the Dyula term for 'house', '*gbo*'. Simultaneously, it was adopted in militia circles as the key term for referring to the intricate process of networking: the fission and fusion of groups and 'groupuscules', the continuous fragmenting and merging of formal self-defence groups as well as the formation and disintegration of smaller fractions, of bands of friends and of ad hoc squads of youth militia members offering their 'violent

labour' to state and non-state actors. The cases of Marcus Garvey and Ato Belly not only illustrated the vibrancy of networking but also revealed the double dynamics of bigmanity involved in this: the search of groups for leadership and patronage as well as the quest of Big Men to gather and coach 'elements', merge fractions and federate militia groups.

By choosing to approach the problematic of this volume on networks and Big Men in conflict situations within a perspective of impersonation and social mobility, I have tried to bring out both the geographical and the historical specificity of militia formation in the Ivorian conflict of the preceding decade *and* its universality in terms of juvenile subalternity and post-colonial urbanity.

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Notes

1 It was the last telephone conversation because Ato Belly died soon after. It appears that Ato was severely wounded during that night's battle and spent a couple of days in hospital before being acquitted. Less than one week into his convalescence, Ato was shot dead in his house by people who have so far remained unidentified.

2 The history of IB and his Invisible Commando remains to be elucidated. His role in the battle against Gbagbo is as murky as his participation in the *coup d'état* of 2002. On 27 April IB was killed and his Invisible Commando dismantled.

3 CNLB = Comité National pour la Libération de Bouaké; FLP = Front pour la Libération du Peuple; GCLCI = Groupement des Combattants pour la Libération de la Côte d'Ivoire.

4 UMAS = L'Union des Mouvements d'Autodéfense du Sud.

5 The entire corpus of formal and informal interviews on which this chapter is based amounts to approximately 110 conducted with seventy-four interlocutors during four spells of fieldwork between March 2008 and March 2010. In order to document the post-electoral crisis of November 2010–May 2011, I kept in touch with about seventeen former interlocutors, mostly by telephone and sometimes by email.

6 The standard format for referring to formal field interviews is 'Name d/m/y'.

7 The full song is '*Donnez treillis oooh ça va finir* (2x)' (Give us uniforms oh it will finish), adding 'han got the natty dread'. The word 'dread' is an interesting contamination of dress (the expression 'natty dress') and dreadlock, which together with the rest of the English, 'got the', indexes the presence of Liberian fellow combatants (mercenaries as well as members of the LIMA militia) on the western front. Garvey could not explain the meaning of the word 'han'.

8 Having observed this confusion, Ato Belly proposed to the militia leadership that they create and supervise a GPP intelligence service.

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4 | Demobilized or remobilized? Lingering rebel structures in post-war Liberia

Mariam Persson

Introduction[1]

Over the years there have been numerous examples of how formal security institutions in contemporary Africa have proved incapable of providing, or unwilling to provide, its citizens with basic security. Not surprisingly, mistrust of these formal institutions and authorities has made people turn to alternative solutions to cope with their everyday lives and safeguard their basic human security. What is surprising, however, is how little we still know about these informal security mechanisms in Africa. International donors and others who seek to contribute to the strengthening of the security context in African states have repeatedly failed to look beyond the official façade of the state and its formal security institutions in order to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of security and insecurity in Africa. But without acknowledging the informal we will undoubtedly be unsuccessful in recognizing the very actors, mechanisms and networks ordinary African citizens often rely on for their basic security. Accordingly, we may fail to acknowledge and support security structures and initiatives that actually do work while providing assistance to inefficient or unavailable security mechanisms. By searching beyond and beneath the official state structures and formal institutions for security provision, we will be able to recognize the importance of informal security providers and come closer to an understanding of how informal security networks operate. While doing this we will also be able to identify influential, yet informal, actors of power that may not be visible from a formal state-centred perspective, and more importantly, perhaps this will enable us to identify hidden links between the formal and informal power structures shaping the security reality of many African countries.

In August 2003 the warring parties of Liberia signed the peace agreement that after two civil wars (1989–96 and 1999–2003) ended years of brutal fighting in the West African country. The war-torn republic now faced enormous challenges. Liberia was to be rebuilt, and security inaugurated. Since then Liberia, with major assistance and funding from the international community, has undergone a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) process of ex-combatants to restore peace and stability, and security

AFRICAN CONFLICTS AND INFORMAL POWER

BIG MEN AND NETWORKS

EDITED BY
MATS UTAS

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helps us think more critically and creatively about who benefits from African crises – and why outside interventions so often fail.'

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In the aftermath of an armed conflict in Africa, the international community both produces and demands from local partners a variety of blueprints for reconstructing state and society. The aim is to re-formalize the state after what is viewed as a period of fragmentation. In reality, African economies and polities are very much informal in character, with informal actors, including so-called Big Men, often using their positions in the formal structure as a means to reach their own goals.

Through a variety of in-depth case studies, including the DRC, Sierra Leone and Liberia, ***African Conflicts and Informal Power*** shows how important informal political and economic networks are in many of the continent's conflict areas. Moreover, it demonstrates that without a proper understanding of the impact of these networks, attempts to formalize African states, particularly those emerging from wars, will be in vain.

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African conflicts and informal power

Big Men and networks

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